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**INFORMATION REPORT**

PREPARED AND DISSEMINATED BY  
**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY**

COUNTRY **Hungary**

SUBJECT **Travel Regulations/Permits/Living Conditions/  
Working Conditions/Mail Regulations**

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**1. TRAVEL AND COMMUTING**

Travel within Hungary is unrestricted. One can travel by railroad, air, river boat and autobus. To travel from Hungary to the USSR, Rumania, East Germany, CSR and Yugoslavia, it is possible to travel by rail and air only. 50X1-HUM

**2. It is not necessary to obtain authorizations from the local police or to obtain a police permit to purchase train or bus tickets.**

Local and cross country travel tickets for trains and buses could be purchased at the stations and bus tickets could be purchased from the bus driver if desired. At the time of my departure from Budapest in April 1956, train tickets could be purchased at the railroad stations at standard fare. They were also available at standard fare plus a small fee when purchased on a train. To the best of my knowledge the only persons enjoying special privileges, such as purchasing tickets at half price, were railroad employees. I did not notice priorities given to special individuals or classes when the trains were crowded with the exception of invalids and pregnant women who were always given seats. The tickets were collected and cancelled enroute by the conductor who was spotchecked occasionally by his superior. There was no other check on a traveler unless he appeared suspicious to the conductor or was under surveillance. If a traveler aboard a train decided to exchange his ticket for another route he was penalized for half the value of the ticket.

**3. During local travel and travel within Hungary, baggage was not opened for checking. Travelers were stopped and luggage checked only if the traveler appeared suspicious to the officials. Quite often, train travelers were subjected to a surprise check but only when the train traveled near restricted areas or in the border zones. To the best of my knowledge neither the conductor on the train or the bus driver made a list of travelers' names nor kept records. Transportation officials who were under surveillance at all times were forbidden to accept tips but still it was possible to make a bribe.**

**4. As of April 1956 people no longer rode as passengers on freight trains.**

**5. All privately owned automobiles travel from one city to another. It was obligatory to have a license and a registration tag. Only owners of**

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automobiles could purchase gasoline with ration coupons from government gasoline stations. Bicycle registration was mandatory. It was necessary to register in a police station for a permit to purchase a bicycle and obtain a license plate. This also applied to motor bikes, scooters and motorcycles. Many people traveled to and from work by bicycle. Each rider had to carry a picture identification card. As a rule there were no document check points encountered when traveling by bicycle.

6. The only transportation by boat was on the Tisza River and the Danube River, and also Lake Balaton. Tickets for boat travel were purchased at the docks and no special permit was needed.

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7. Air travel within Hungary was available to all.

The planes flew on schedules which seemed to be reliable. It was impossible for a person to charter a plane. Only political officials and other trusted persons were permitted to obtain passage to other Satellite countries or to countries outside of the Soviet orbit. A passport, picture identification card and other permits were necessary to fly abroad. Application for a flight ticket was made at the Magyar Air Travel office in Budapest. The ticket was picked up and paid for at the airport. Reservations to fly abroad had to be made ten days to two weeks in advance of the travel date.

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8. Most of the local populace used street cars and buses for transportation within the city. Local residents also used taxis frequently.

City transportation was checked by the police but only when they seemed to be looking for someone. During these checks, travelers had to produce a permit to travel which had been furnished by the employer of the traveler. Many of the people who lived in villages several kilometers distant, sometimes up to 2 1/2 hours away, commuted by train. Workers could travel on city transportation and commuter trains on reduced fare if they purchased weekly fares.

#### 9. HOUSING

It was very difficult to obtain permanent housing. The housing shortage became more acute each day. Each community surrounding Budapest had a housing agency or housing administration where a person filed for permanent residence. These were all government controlled agencies. If one desired housing, bribery or payment of excess fees was customary.

It was necessary or important to be a member of the Communist Party. To register for a permanent address in Budapest or one of the surrounding cities, one had to furnish the landlord with the following information: complete biographical history, residences for 12 years past, previous employment for 12 years, and the name and address of the last previous landlord. It was necessary also to present a picture identification card and be subjected to a thorough police questioning.

10. To obtain temporary housing it was necessary to fill out an application with one of the housing agencies. In most cases one could obtain temporary housing up to 90 days in any of the hotels. A new arrival in the city was required to report to the police within 24 hours of arrival. He was then given a provisional 90-day stay permit although these were sometimes extended for a year, never longer. The procedure to obtain temporary housing was very complicated, involving many trips to the police station.
11. When a local resident visited friends or relatives or entertained out of town visitors it was necessary to report the visit to the police.
12. When leaving permanent housing, one had to obtain an exit permit. To prove proper deregistration, the individual leaving permanent housing carried a legalized exit permit with the police seal stamped upon it, made out by the individual and countersigned by the landlord.

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13. RESTAURANTS, CANTEENS, MARKETING

Many local inhabitants patronized the restaurants and cafes. Permits and coupons were not necessary. A check by police in these places was infrequent. In factories or other places of employment where lunches were served, a workers' permit had to be presented for lunch. At the finer restaurants and cafes it was sometimes necessary to make reservations in advance. Most of the restaurants had menus from which standard or special meals could be selected. Tips were always included in the price of the meal but one could tip extra if one wished. Some of the restaurants forbade additional tipping and the waiters were forced to refuse them.

14. In purchasing foods at the cooperatives and markets it was not necessary to have ration coupons. There were many foods which were not available at the cooperative stores which one could buy on the Black Market but the price was high. One could also buy a variety of foodstuffs at the open market. The prices in the open markets were slightly higher than the state cooperative stores.

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15. CLOTHING, LUXURIES AND NECESSITIES

In April 1956 all controls on the purchase of clothing were lifted. There was no rationing of shoes, clothing or other articles of apparel. As a rule, factory workers wore shop coats or overalls and these were purchased at a discount when a work book was presented. Most of the school children and the teachers wore a uniform. The hats worn by the children were patterned after the Russian military hat.

16. PERSONAL EFFECTS

Many of the local inhabitants wear wristwatches. Only among the farmers was this not customary. Many of the local inhabitants, even school children, carried brief cases. The brief cases were of leather with two or more compartments and most of them had zippers. In these brief cases the inhabitants carried a variety of articles which included lunch, folding raincoats, newspapers, etc. The men usually carried personal documents in a pocket secretary or wallet in the left inside coat pocket. In the billfold they carried additional identification cards, money and keys. Other pocket articles carried by men were key cases, handkerchiefs and nail clippers. The women carried in the rear left pants pocket. The highest commonly used bank note was the 100 forint.

17. Personal documents such as identification cards, permits and other effects of a deceased individual are usually turned over to the next of kin.

18. MEDICAL AND DENTAL CARE

When a person, covered under a hospital plan required medical care, the procedure was as follows:

The person reported to the clinic at his place of employment where he presented his identification card and work book. The person was then examined and if his illness made him eligible for hospital care he could be admitted to a hospital or could subscribe to private medical care. If the person was not covered by hospitalization he could obtain medical aid from a government institution or from a private doctor if he could afford the fee.

19. The government medical institutions are under close scrutiny by the Soviets who check constantly on the status of people on sick leave. Periodic visits are made to the sick person's home and to his employer. For retired persons the only thing necessary for medical or dental care was for the person to present a retirement card at one of the government medical institutions. Many local inhabitants had dental work done by private dentists because of the inferior quality of dental work performed at government institutions.

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20. MISCELLANEOUS NEEDS

Local telephone booths are located in the post office building and at the railroad stations. There were also quite a number of sidewalk booths. Long distance calls could be made only from the booth at the post office. Local calls could be made from any booth.

21. Dry cleaning and shoe repair was done in government owned shops. Early in 1956 a few small independent shoe repair and cleaning shops were opened. All of the commercial laundries were nationalized. The quality of the laundry soap was good and it was easily obtainable. Laundry was paid for by its weight and the usual length of time for laundry service was two weeks. Razor blades, tooth paste, and other toilet articles were available in drug stores and department stores and were not rationed. Other cosmetics, scarce in 1955, began to appear in greater quantity in 1956 in department and drug stores only. Cigars, cigarettes and tobacco were not rationed and could be bought in tobacco and grocery stores. In the rural communities and villages most of the people rolled their own cigarettes. Some of the more popular brands of cigarettes in Budapest and vicinity were Monkas, Hatevestero and Tulipant.

22. Prices of the most commonly used articles of clothing and personal items in April 1956 were men's shirts, 80-200 forints; men's suits, 500-1800 forints; and men's shoes, 300 forints and up.

23. EMPLOYMENT

There was a constant demand for the white collar type of help. Unskilled workers were forced to take laboring jobs wherever available. Skilled workers were placed on jobs within their field with no trouble. Employment at the government defense plants was always available. A person applying for a job had to present all of his identification papers and work record to his prospective employer. During the interview the employment manager examined all of the documents and asked many questions.

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24. [redacted] private employment agencies [redacted]

The procedure for applying for employment through these agencies was undoubtedly the same as stated about. Back checks are conducted on applicants before a person is given employment and also while he is working. A new employee was checked at the gate upon entering and leaving, for his identification card, work book and badge, until well known to the guards.

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25. POLITICS, SOCIAL ACTIVITIES, THEATRES, MOVIES, NIGHT CLUBS AND CAFES

In order to earn a decent living many people have been forced to join the Communist Party. The Communist Party requires that members carry membership cards at all times. If a person was unable to produce this membership card when requested, a fine of 100 forints was imposed.

26. The theatre and movie houses were open to the general public at all times. For the opera and ballet, reservations were required. Patrons at the theatre were not subject to a regular police check, however there were occasions when a surprise check was made.
27. Everyone could enter the bars and coffee houses. Most of the night clubs and beer gardens were frequented by Communist Party members only and did not have a police check but occasionally a surprise check was made.
28. No permit or pass was necessary to attend church. Previously anyone who took part in church activity would shortly lose his job. In the past several months this practice has been abolished.
29. The custom of visiting one's friends or relatives on Sunday evenings is still very common.

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30. In factories and other places of employment people often engaged in discussions and debates during the rest periods. These discussions were usually regarding political issues. Invariably the topic of discussion everywhere ended up on the subject of freedom.
31. Personal document checks made in the streets could never be eradicated. However, when the police stopped anyone on the street, everyone in the vicinity would immediately walk away. 50X1-HUM
32. ALIEN RESIDENCE, TRAVEL, POSTAL REGULATIONS AND CENSORSHIP  
For a foreigner to obtain a permanent or temporary residence permit it was necessary for him to report to the government housing agency. Living and travel accommodations were granted foreigners only upon producing a passport. When a foreigner entered the country he was required to register at the police station and a temporary identification document was issued by the police.
33. All travel abroad was handled by the government transportation office in Budapest where visas and exit permits were issued. All foreign travelers had to declare the amount of currency they were carrying. This was validated on the passport.
34. All local delivery mail could be mailed without restriction. Letters going abroad did not have to be brought to the post office unsealed. A person who made more than ordinary visits to the post office with mail going abroad was looked upon with distrust and was asked for identification. Snapshots and other photographs were permitted to be enclosed in mail going abroad. Normally, delivery of local mail within Hungary took from one to three days. It took from two to eight days for a letter going abroad to leave Hungary. Incoming foreign mail was delivered directly to the house. If the person was not at home, the postman left a slip of paper informing the addressee that his letter would be surrendered to him if he brought the slip of paper and proper identification to the post office. The letter could be picked up the same day at the post office. For the six months prior to April 1956, there were no changes in the postal rates. mail in Hungary is still censored. However, it is a secret method and not as obvious as it was previously.

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